

CLD1-4



# Influencing Others with the Stories You Tell

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**E**ffective leaders have learned that good illustrations can make a point. Stories can be used to train, mentor, and coach others. Stories of how others have dealt with change can be useful to help organizations manage their own change.

Stories, analogies and metaphors are often the best way to communicate complex facts and basic truths. Stories are a way for our minds to see and remember what our ears hear. Even folks who say they can never remember a joke will say, “Oh, I’ve heard that one” as soon as the storyteller gets started.

## Storytelling Themes

Effective stories can be built around several common themes that most of us have experienced in our lives. Good storytelling is a matter of recalling events that use these experiences to relate a truth to others.

- **Mistakes and failures.** Not all things that happen to us are good. We may have learned more from the bad things that have happened, and they are almost certainly imprinted more strongly in our brains. Having the self-confidence to admit our mistakes and learn from them can be a very effective teaching tool.
- **Unexpected opportunities.** The unexpected can also be a good source of stories. Those “ah ha” moments can be a rich source of illustrations.

- **Risks and rewards.** The world is full of people who were willing to take a chance. The great explorers of history are often remembered as much for their struggle against the odds as for the things they discovered. Everyone remembers the dangers of Columbus’ first voyage even if we can’t recall which island he landed on.
- **Choices and consequences.** Children often learn from “if..., then...” stories, even if they have to learn the hard way. But not all choices and consequences stories are bad. Choosing to stay in school or choosing to do the “right thing” is often rewarded with benefits that last a lifetime.
- **Lessons learned.** Life and education are ongoing experiences. The lessons can be a rich source of material for a storyteller, especially when the lessons illustrate a truth that can be passed on to others.
- **Obstacles and challenges.** Some of the highest impact stories are those that tug at our heartstrings. The Olympic Games would just be athletes competing in obscure sports if it weren’t for the drama in the lives of many of the participants. Someone who overcomes a challenge stirs us to cheer them on to excellence.



*Tell me a fact  
and I’ll learn.  
Tell me the  
truth and I’ll  
believe. But tell  
me a story and  
it will live  
in my heart  
forever.*

–Indian Proverb

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- **Someone who inspired me.** Everyone has people in their lives who make a difference. They cared enough to offer advice. They changed the direction of our lives. These are the stories that can inspire others to action.

## Storytelling Tips

Some people seem to be natural storytellers, but we all can tell a story. When we answer the question “How was your day?” we’re telling a story. The key to telling stories is to have something interesting to say and to say it in an interesting way. Following are some tips to improve your storytelling.

- **Tell a personal story.** Use the stories from your own life. They are the stories you know and have probably told to family and friends.
- **Be honest and sincere.** True stories are the easiest to remember, and they build a relationship of trust with your listener.
- **Use others’ stories.** There’s nothing wrong with using someone else’s story as long as you’re honest about it and give appropriate credit. Books, legends, fairy tales, and stories you’ve heard from some other source can communicate truth as well as your own stories.
- **Have a beginning, middle and end.** The story should be logical, easy to follow, and should *never* leave the listener wondering what you meant.
- **Make the story visual.** A good story will appeal to all the senses. It’s like seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling with your ears.
- **Use body language.** Make eye contact and gesture naturally. Pause for effect and to allow the listener to catch up with the story.

## Summary

Some of the world’s great leaders have succeeded because they were compelling storytellers. They could grab the attention of an audience, they could earn their trust, and they could communicate effectively. Facts, figures, and complex ideas are easier to convey when constructed in the framework of a story. Like many other life skills, storytelling becomes easier with practice. And, if they’re good stories, people will want to hear them again and again.

## References

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